

**STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL ERIC T. OLSON
TO
THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
REGARDING THE AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN STRATEGIC REVIEW
1 April 2009**

Good morning. Chairman Levin, Senator McCain, distinguished members of the Committee...

Thank you for the invitation to appear before this committee to represent the United States Special Operations Command. I will focus on the roles of our headquarters and joint special operations forces in addressing the current and potential threats posed by extremists and their allies and networks in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The situation in this region is increasingly dire. Al Qa'eda's surviving leaders have proven adept at hiding, communicating and inspiring. Operating in and from remote sites in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, Al Qa'eda remains a draw for local and foreign fighters who subscribe to its extremist ideology and criminality.

The Taliban, although not militarily strong, is pervasive and brutal. Operating in the guise of both nationalists and keepers of the faith, but behaving in the manner of street gangs and mafias, they have forced and intimidated a mostly benign populace to bend to their will. Their methods run the relatively narrow range from malicious to evil.

The President's strategy announced last week is one we fully support. We have contributed to the review of the past several months and are pleased to see that the strategy includes a clear focus on Al Qa'eda as the enemy and that a whole-of-government approach is directed.

We know well that progress in Afghanistan and Pakistan will be neither quick nor easy. We, as a Nation and international community, must be prepared for an extended campaign – a

campaign that must go well beyond traditional military activities. Increasing the presence and capacity of civilian agencies and international organizations, to include sufficient funding and training, are essential to help develop and implement the basic functions of credible government in Afghanistan, and to assist Pakistan's efforts to dismantle safe havens and displace extremists in its border provinces. Also essential is robust support to the military, law enforcement, border security and intelligence organizations of Afghanistan and Pakistan themselves – as it is ultimately they who must succeed in their lands.

United States Special Operations Command and the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps forces it trains, equips, deploys and supports have key roles and missions within this campaign. With a long history of counter terror, counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare operations in many of earth's crisis and tension spots, the culture and ethos of special operations forces are well suited to many of the more demanding aspects of our mission in Afghanistan and to our increasing interaction with Pakistan's military and Frontier Corps forces.

Right now in Afghanistan, as for the last seven years, Special Operations activities range from high-tech man-hunting to providing veterinary services for tribal livestock. The direct action missions are urgent and necessary, as they provide the time and space needed for the more indirect counterinsurgency operations to have their decisive effect. Undertaken in proper balance, these actions address immediate security threats while also engaging the underlying instability in the region.

In Pakistan, we continue to work with security forces at the scale and pace set by them, and we are prepared to do more. With our Pakistani partners, Special Operations Forces are currently helping train Pakistani trainers in the North-West Frontier Province in order to enhance their counter-insurgency operations. While we share much with them, our forces are in turn learning much about our common adversaries and the social complexities of the region. We stand ready to continue to work with Pakistani forces, and to stand by them for the long term.

While certain units of the special operations force are leading high-tech, high-end efforts to find and capture or kill the top terrorist and extremist targets in Afghanistan, fundamental to most of the deployed special operations force is our enduring partnership with our Afghan counterparts. Under a program that began over three years ago, US Special Forces, at the 12-man team level, have trained Afghan Commandos in the classrooms and on the firing ranges, and then moved with them to their assigned regions across the country. Living remotely with them on small camps, continuing the training and mentoring, and integrating with them on day and night combat operations has had great effect. Supporting their local development and assistance efforts has had perhaps even a more powerful impact. This program was recently expanded to formally partner US Special Forces with non-Commando Afghan battalions – a program that will consume most of the additional special operations force that will be deployed as part of the 17,000 troop increase.

The Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps component commands of United States Special Operations Command use authorities and a budget granted by legislation to me as the USSOCOM commander to organize, equip, train and provide their forces to support operational commanders globally. When outside the United States, all special operations forces are under the operational control of the appropriate Geographic Combatant Commander.

USSOCOM's budget, which is historically slightly under two percent of the total Defense budget, is intended to fund materials, services, equipment, research, training and operations that are peculiar to special operations forces. It primarily enables modification of Service-common equipment and procurement of specialized items for the conduct of missions that are specifically and appropriately special operations forces' missions to perform.

In general, the SOCOM budget has been robust enough to provide for rapid response to a broad set of crises. We rely on each of the Services to provide for our long-term sustainment in wartime environments and to develop and sustain the enabling capabilities, and on operational commanders to assign it to their special operations task forces. We can serve in both

supporting and supported roles at the operational level. Special operations' effects are actually core elements around which key parts of a strategy can be based.

While more than 10,000 members of our special operation forces are now under the command of General Petraeus in the Central Command area of responsibility and around one hundred more are working in Afghanistan under NATO's ISAF command structure; about 2,000 others are in about 65 countries on an average day. Their activities, fully approved and coordinated, cover the broad spectrum of traditional military activities – well beyond the stereotypical one-dimensional gunslinger to encompass the Three-Dimensional warrior, equally adept at defense, development and diplomacy. Special operations bring soft power with a hard edge.

The employment of special operations forces will actually not change much as a result of a revised overall strategy – our units have been conducting both counter terrorism and counter insurgency for several years. We will continue to provide our broad capabilities to our fullest capacity in order to meet the needs of our elected and appointed civilian leaders and our military operational commanders.

Our strategy in Afghanistan must secure the primary urban areas and main routes so that life and legitimate business can begin a return to normalcy. But Afghanistan is not Iraq, and most of the population is not urban. Security must be felt in the hinterland, provided by Afghan forces supported by small teams of US and NATO troops and enhanced by civilian agencies in a manner that improves local life by local standards. I am encouraged by the prioritization of this approach in the new strategy.

Inherent to our success, and to the defeat of our enemies, is the realization that this is a real fight as long as Al Qa'eda, the Taliban and associated extremists want it to be. Civilian casualties are mostly a result of their tactics, not ours. The operational commanders I hear from are doing all they can to minimize the number of non-combatant deaths because they both abhor the reality of civilian casualties and they understand the negative strategic impact of such deaths. They also know that, as long as our enemies force non-combatant women,

children and others to support their operations or remain on targeted facilities after warnings have been issued, some will die. They also know the conditions, numbers and severity of the casualties will be highly exaggerated and quickly communicated. We must acknowledge the seriousness of this challenge and find ways to mitigate its effects, especially as we increase our troop presence in the coming months.

I will conclude with a simple statement of pride in the special operations force that I am honored to command. Created by a proactive Congress and nurtured by your strong support over the last 22 years, United States Special Operations Command headquarters has brought together units from all four Services to develop and sustain a truly magnificent joint capability. Special Operations Forces are contributing globally well beyond what its percentage of the total force would indicate, and in Afghanistan and Pakistan they are well known for their effectiveness.

I stand ready for your questions.